

U.S. Comments on the proposed draft text of the OIE *International Aquatic Animal Health Code* on Chapter X.X.X (Guidelines for Fallowing in Aquaculture)

(Submitted December 20, 2001)

General comments on the concept of Fallowing

Article X.X.X.1

Introduction

The recommendation that fallowing be applied even if disease problems are not present may be premature and too stringent.

Article X.X.X.3.

Fallowing of Aquaculture Establishments

While the concept and intent of these guidelines are good, they do, however, seem to categorically state that fallowing should be required of all establishments. This could be problematic since there are many different types of aquaculture operations, and therefore, fallowing guidelines may not be equally applicable to each situation.

The recommendation of annual fallowing is not practical in operations producing crops with multi-year production cycles or operations with continuous production systems. For example, in the catfish industry farmers would suffer two years of lost production even if the catfish ponds were to be fallowed only once every two years. Furthermore, farmers would also have to contend with already difficult environmental restrictions. Fallowing of catfish ponds would significantly increase water use and effluent discharge. In many regions of the country, severe water shortages exist, and pumping costs to extract water from underground aquifers would make a marginally profitable operation financially unsound. Commercial trout and baitfish operations would face similar problems.

Finally, and again as mentioned above under the “Introduction” heading, requiring fallowing under conditions where disease is not a problem, or to unaffected adjacent farms, may be excessive.

Fallowing following disease outbreaks: while there may be situations where fallowing does make sense (such as salmon net pens and other salmonid production facilities), for most of the warm water fish operations, there is no good evidence that fallowing would be beneficial.

Based on these concerns, our changes are shown to the text of the proposed chapter below (note, suggested changes are shown either as strike-outs, or in bold text):

GUIDELINES FOR FALLOWING IN AQUACULTURE

Article X.X.X.1.

Introduction

Fallowing is a procedure commonly used to restore the environment of an aquaculture establishment. Fallowing starts immediately after a site has been emptied of aquatic animals, and in accessible facilities it should be carried out after cleaning and disinfection have taken place.

Fallowing is usually may be carried out as a routine hygienic measure prior to the introduction of new populations of aquatic animals into a given site. Fallowing has, however, a specific application as a disease control tool after an outbreak of disease in an aquaculture establishment, to increase confidence that the site is free of the disease agent after the aquatic animals have been removed and disinfection has taken place.

A number of diseases of aquatic animals pose a threat to the aquaculture sector, as well as to wild stocks of aquatic animals.

In order to diminish problems caused by diseases of socio-economic importance, the Veterinary Authorities or other Competent Authority responsible for aquatic animal health in a country should seek to establish satisfactory procedures for fallowing of aquaculture establishments in connection with control and eradication of disease control

The Veterinary Authorities or other Competent Authority should also seek to recommend fallowing procedures in aquaculture establishments even if disease problems are not present, i.e. before stocking a site with a new population of aquatic animals.

Article X.X.X.2.

Legal powers

In cases where fallowing may be a compulsory measure, for instance to help in the eradication of specific diseases or to restore disease free zone status, countries will have to establish the necessary legal framework that is needed for the implementation of fallowing procedures in aquaculture establishments. Legal provisions could include:

- Provisions for the circumstances under which fallowing has to be carried out.
- Listing of those diseases for which fallowing procedures are compulsory.
- Cleaning and disinfection procedures prior to fallowing.
- General procedures for fallowing of aquaculture establishments.
- Length of fallowing period.
- Restocking procedures after fallowing.

Article X.X.X-3.2

Fallowing of aquaculture establishments

For disease prevention purposes, all aquaculture establishments should be regularly emptied and left fallow in accordance with current guidelines issued by the Veterinary Authorities or other Competent Authority responsible for aquatic animal health. These guidelines will be broad as they must address different kinds of aquaculture establishments; they must not target specified diseases and thus can only stipulate fallowing periods generally recognised to have a beneficial impact.

If a serious communicable disease is suspected or has been confirmed in an aquaculture establishment, all farms (sites) in control or surveillance zones established by the Veterinary Authorities or other Competent Authority should be subjected to a statutory period of fallowing, regardless of whether the farm (site) is only suspected of being infected, whether there are signs of the disease, or whether the disease has been confirmed.

Under certain conditions and based on the information provided, disease confirmation by an authorized laboratory, the Veterinary Authorities or other Competent Authority may determine that installations shall be emptied and left fallow in accordance with a co-ordinated plan for measurements taken to combat a control the disease agent.

Technical parameters for the development of a statutory fallowing plan:

Fallowing should start immediately after removal of all stocked aquatic animals.

The length of a statutory fallowing period should be based on scientific evidence of the likelihood of a disease agent surviving outside its host in the aquaculture environment, but also on the social and economical factors that prevail in the countries or zones concerned.

As a general basis, fallowing of aquaculture establishments without disease problems should be no less than one month in the 'summer season' and two months during the 'winter season'. For aquaculture establishments in temperate regions that culture tropical species, fallowing during the 'winter season' may be a normal part of the culture cycle. For aquaculture establishments located in tropical regions, the length of time aquaculture establishments are fallowed may have to be adjusted to accommodate the difficult situation imposed by extended rainy seasons ('winter' in some regions), which may make successful fallowing impossible (i.e. a total dry-out cannot be achieved).

Within a control or combat an affected zone in which a notifiable disease has been suspected or confirmed and for which compulsory fallowing is ordered, the length of a fallowing period should be assessed in relation to the number of sites, the qualities of the sites, and the extent of the disease outbreak.

Article X.X.X.4 3.

Instructions

Countries establishing fallowing procedures should develop a detailed set of instructions for clearance, cleaning and disinfection of aquaculture establishments prior to fallowing. For the purpose, the set of instructions set out in Section 5.2., Appendices 5.2.2., 5.2.3. and 5.2.4. in this Code should be used as guidelines.

Article X.X.X.54.

Restocking

All *aquaculture establishments* that have been under restriction as regards the occurrence of a notifiable disease should not be restocked until the statutory *fallowing* period has been completed.

The restocking of such farms should be from *aquaculture establishments* approved by the *Veterinary Authorities* or other *Competent Authority*.

We hope you find these comments useful. Thank you for the opportunity to review these guidelines.

Sincerely,

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